

FERDINAND LINDHEIMER HOUSE
491 South Comal Avenue
New Braunfels
Comal County
Texas

HABS No. TEX 374

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TEX 374

FERDINAND LINDHEIMER HOUSE

Location: 491 South Comal Avenue
New Braunfels
Comal County
Texas
Latitude: 29 42' 02" N Longitude: 98 07' 05" W

Present Owner: The New Braunfels Conservation Society

Present Occupant and Use: An historical house museum operated by the New Braunfels Conservation Society since 1968.

Statement of Significance: About 1852 Ferdinand Jacob Lindheimer, noted Texas botanist, built his home and office-print shop for the newspaper, "Die Neue Braunfelser Zeitung". In this area this is the best-preserved early house that is constructed of the medieval-type, heavy-timber framing (Fachwerk). It was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark in 1967, and approved for the National Register in 1971.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. General History: In 1842 the "Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas" (Society for the Protection of German Immigrants to Texas) was formed in Germany. The director of the Verein, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, was met by Ferdinand Lindheimer, a pioneer of Texas since 1836; the director was advised by Lindheimer on plans for the settlements. The Verein purchased a large, remote tract north of the Llano River, but when the first scheduled settlers began arriving at Texas ports in July 1844, it was quite urgent to acquire a location nearer to the coast. Following the advice of Lindheimer, Prince Carl purchased a small tract at the junction of the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers. The first settlers arrived there in March, 1845, and the town was named Neu (New) Braunfels. The earliest temporary homes were built of logs in the typical American manner, but soon the townspeople began employing their skilled craftsmen to build better houses of "Fachwerk," or of brick or stone, using the construction methods of their original homeland. The census of 1850 gave the population of New

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Braunfels as 1298 persons; it was the fourth largest city in Texas. The following craftsmen were listed: Blacksmiths 11; Brickmakers 3; Cabinet makers 7; Carpenters 23; Locksmith 1; Sawyer 1; Stone-masons 6.

2. Ownership: The street plan of the town was laid out by surveyor Nicolaus Zink; most lots had a street frontage of 100 German feet (equal to about 96 English feet), and a depth of 200 German feet. Prince Carl presented Ferdinand Lindheimer a lot on East Comal Avenue in appreciation for his services to the Verein. Here overlooking the clear Comal River Lindheimer built a small log house; he was living here with his wife when the German traveller, Dr. Ferdinand Roemer, visited New Braunfels in 1851. On April 3, 1852 Lindheimer was chosen in a mass meeting to become editor of the German language newspaper, "Die Neue Braunfelser Zeitung"; the first issue came out November 12, 1852; it was published weekly until November 29, 1957.

The original portion of this house was probably built in 1852; it was a double house with two rooms for his home, and two for publishing the newspaper. Later a shed room was added. The original log house remained on the lot until the early 1930's when it was accidentally destroyed by fire. The ownership remained in the family until 1968 when Ferdinand's grand-daughter, Mrs. Sida Simon Martin, gave the house and property to the New Braunfels Conservation Society.

3. Date of Erection: Probably built in 1852.
4. Builder: No definite information is available, but evidently the builder was an immigrant carpenter trained in the traditional construction methods of the German homeland.
5. Alterations and additions: It appears that the brick nogging was exposed on the exterior when the original house was erected; the walls were probably plastered on the exterior at a later date. The shed-room, also of "Fachwerk" construction, was added a few years after the original four-room portion; the stonework nogging

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has been reworked and partially replaced. Stone walks, the terraces and fences have been recently constructed, but otherwise the house stands quite as the builders erected it.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Ferdinand Jacob Lindheimer was born May 21, 1801 at Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. He studied at the Universities of Jena and Bonn, specializing in courses in the classics and sciences; under the renowned educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, he was a student of botany. Later, he participated in the liberal revolt, the "Frankfurter Putsch" and was forced to flee his homeland. In the United States in 1834 he visited eastern universities and stayed for a time in St. Louis; he then went to Mexico where he worked on plantations near Jalapa. Knowing of the Texas Revolution, he returned to the United States where in New Orleans he joined a brigade that became a part of the Army of the Republic of Texas for the defense of Galveston; his company was marching to join Sam Houston's forces when word came that the Mexican Army had been defeated at San Jacinto.

After the Revolution Lindheimer farmed for a short time, but he then became engaged in botanical research throughout the wild, Indian-inhabited areas of south central Texas. With a horse-drawn cart and hunting dogs he spent more than a dozen years roaming the canyons and hills of the Edwards Plateau collecting leaf and flower specimens of trees, shrubs and annuals that were unknown to the botanists of America and Europe. Many new species and one genus, Lindheimera, bear his name.

Through public donations the people of New Braunfels purchased a newspaper press, and Ferdinand Lindheimer was chosen to be the editor of "Die Neue Braunfelser Zeitung", the weekly German-language newspaper; beginning in 1852 and continuing for twenty years, Lindheimer developed one of the important early newspapers of the state. In his editorial columns he always championed the cause of freedom, and materially aided the cultural developments of the German community. He died on December 2, 1879. He is best known in the field of science; his pressed plant specimens may be found in the botanical collections of many universities of America and Europe.

C. Bibliography:

Bieseke, Dr. R. L. History of the Early German Settlements in Texas 1830-1860. Austin, Texas: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1930.

Haas, Oscar. History of New Braunfels and Comal County, 1844-1946. Austin, Texas: The Steck Company, 1968.

Roemer, Ferdinand. Texas, with Particular Reference to German Immigration. Translation by Oswald Mueller. San Antonio, Texas: Standard Printing Co., 1935.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: It is the only well-preserved, medieval-type, heavy timber (Fachwerk) building in the city. It is a double house, with the function expressed by the two front doors. One door enters into the area of the newspaper office; the other to the home of Ferdinand Lindheimer and his family.
2. Condition of the Fabric: Good; there has been some restoration and repair work on the house, and in general it has preserved the original character.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: A rectangle, 28'-6" x 24', with an added "ell" lean-to; outside dimension. One story, with an attic and a small cellar.
2. Foundations: Mortared masonry of roughly-squared local limestone, down to a depth below the cellar floor.
3. Wall construction: The front, rectangular portion of the house, built about 1852, is constructed in the traditional medieval German manner with mortised heavy-timber "Fachwerk" frame filled in with brick nogging and plastered. In the kitchen-dining room the brick-filled original wall is unplastered; it is probable that the exterior of the early house was not plastered.

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4. Porch, etc.: The rear shed roof covers a narrow porch and the stone steps leading to the cellar. At grade there is a small terrace space paved with flagstones.
5. Chimney: Near the center of the original house there is a brick chimney that served wood-burning stoves in the cellar and three rooms on the main level. It is probable that there was a sheetmetal chimney through the shed roof of the kitchen-dining room.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Each of the two entrance doorways have three-light transoms above. The three-panel doors are 2'-8" x 6'-6" with narrow, plain trim. The panels are heavy-raised type; the middle panel, about 23" x 28" in size is a single piece of wood, but these panels in both doors have open vertical cracks. The door from the kitchen to the rear porch is a four-panel type. The rear door from the bedroom is of later design with two panels below and glazed with nine lights above.
 - b. Windows: The trim on three sides of the house is slightly recessed; on the northwest side five-inch plain trim is applied on the exterior of the masonry. The double-hung sash are nine-over-six lights. There is a small casement-type window in the cellar, with six lights in each sash. All sash appear to be original.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, materials: The main ridge roof is covered with wood shingles; the slope is 9 in 12. The lean-to roof is covered with raised-rib sheet metal; its slope is 3 in 12.
 - b. Framing: Rafters on the main ridge roof are 2" x 6", spaced 30" on center; these rafters are supported by 5" x 7" purlins which have supporting posts at the midpoints. The lean-to roof is built with rough-sawn 2" x 4" s, 30" o.c., exposed and painted on the under-side.

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- c. Cornice and eaves: On the gable ends the roof projects about two inches, no fascia board. On the front cornice the rafter ends are boxed-in; the projection is about seven inches. The gutters and downspouts are of sheet-metal.

C. Technical Description of the Interiors:

1. Floor plan: The original rectangular house is divided with a central partition with two rooms on either side. The left-hand main door enters to the living quarters: parlor and bedroom; the right-hand doors enter to the newspaper office and the small printing room. In the added shed room there was space for the kitchen and dining. There is a small cellar under the bedroom area. The attic is only partially floored; it was apparently used for storage.
2. Stairway: In the printing room there is "ships ladder" type stair to a trapdoor of the attic. From the rear flagstone terrace there are steps of stone slabs down to the cellar.
3. Flooring: The wood flooring in the rooms of the main section of the house is 5" to 9" in width. The floor of the printing room is of buff-colored brick laid in "basket weave" pattern.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls of the rooms of the main section are plastered, painted an off-white color. The undercoat of plaster was applied directly to the brick nogging. To provide bonding on the surfaces of the timber frame, small pencil-like sticks were placed horizontally across the vertical studs, and the finish coat was then applied. There is no evidence of cracking at these points. The ceilings of three rooms are boarding, painted. The ceiling of the printing room has exposed rough-sawn joists; the underside of attic flooring is painted. In the kitchen-dining room the wall of the earlier structure has the timber frame and brick nogging exposed; the other three walls are plastered, over the "Fachwerk" construction. The ceiling of this room has rafters and rough-sawn sheathing, exposed and painted.

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5. Doors: Interior doors are four panel, except a plank-type door between the office and the print room.
6. Lighting: The house is now lighted with electricity; there is no evidence of earlier lighting fixtures.
7. Heating: Wood-fired stoves were used for heating. From the central brick chimney stoves could be used in the newspaper office, the parlor and bedroom.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The lot has a frontage of about 96 feet (100 German feet) on South Comal Avenue between East Garden and East Jahn Streets. It is about 192 feet from the street line to the rear property line, the bank of the Comal River. The lot has a moderate slope downward from the street line for about 130 feet, then there is a steep drop to the river channel. The house is within fifteen feet of the street curb.
2. Outbuildings: The original log house built by Lindheimer about 1845 stood until this century, but was accidentally destroyed by fire. Near the northeast boundary line a small (10' x 13') "Fachwerk" building was moved to the site; it serves as public restrooms.
3. Landscaping, fences, walks: The front and garden area has a four-foot fence of split-cedar pickets; the side property lines have chain-link fences. The small formal garden has diagonal walks of mortared flagstone; it is planted with indigenous and ornamental plantings. Trees, most of which are recently planted, are informally arranged; they are pecans, oaks, cedars, and huisache. Near the street in front of the garden there is a gray granite monument, an Historical Marker erected by the State of Texas in 1936.

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